

# Sandy Geddis

Alexander (Sandy) Geddis was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1957 and emigrated to Australia with his parents and younger sister in 1961. The family settled in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne's bayside, and Sandy grew up as an Essendon (AFL) supporter.

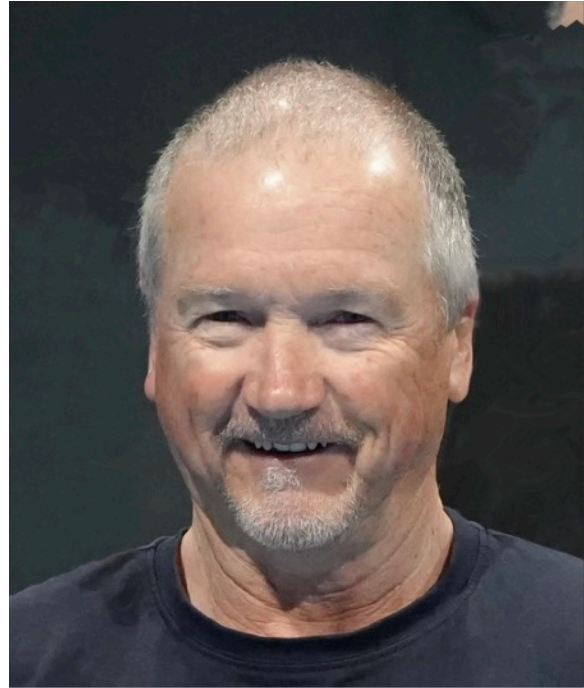
"I didn't play soccer until I got to high school."

He played for Springvale United U13s as a goalkeeper. "I must have been pretty shit in the outfield but showed some degree of aptitude between the sticks." He progressed through the various age groups and were the Victorian Under 16 state champions in the late 70s. Inevitably, genetics caught up with him and he stopped growing. "Being only 166cm was a serious challenge for a keeper.

Several friends and coaches tried to convince him to give goalkeeping away and to play out. "I could run fast," he says. However, he was reluctant to venture beyond his comfort zone and continued to play in goals. During his university days, he played for Waverly City, Brighton and Moorabbin City in the then Victorian Metropolitan League, usually as the second-string keeper.

As a young goalkeeper of Northern Irish heritage, he found a hero in Pat Jennings and began following Tottenham Hotspur. His spectator highlights though are mainly of a domestic nature. He was in the crowd for several of the early qualifying rounds for the 1974 World Cup at Olympic Park. And "I clearly remember in 1973 listening on the radio as Jimmy McKay scored the goal against South Korea to take Australia to its first World Cup, in Germany, the following year."

He's an avid follower of the Socceroos and lived through the stress of Australia's qualification failures after 1974, including attending the 2-2 draw with Iran at the MCG in 1997. But then came 'that' game, the one against Uruguay in Sydney in Nov 2005. He went to the game with some of his current mates from Beechworth.



"About 12 of us travelled up in a minibus for the game." It was dramatic and euphoric but "... we were very disappointed that we couldn't find anywhere in Sydney prepared to keep selling us beer after 1:00AM."

In 2014 Sandy and his wife Anne went to the World Cup finals in Brazil and were in the stands when Australia went 2-1 up against the Netherlands. "What an incredible buzz for both of us. It was almost surreal, irrespective of how it finished up."

After qualifying as a PE teacher, Sandy was posted to Wangaratta, in country Victoria. Here, he joined the football team and played as a winger or left sided midfielder. Eventually he gravitated to playing for Bendigo College of Advanced Education (BCAE), where he met Siggie Nowak and Albert Lebbink, now with Walking Football Brisbane. Sandy enjoyed several great years playing for College, winning the treble one year.

And then, as is the fate of many footballers, Sandy suffered a serious knee injury and had to endure a reconstruction in 1982. He returned for one more year in 1984 and did a brief coaching stint, before calling it a day at 27 years old. "I was recently married and had other

sporting interests I wanted to be able to maintain.” He tried a comeback in 1986 but that ended with a serious injury to the opposite knee, requiring another reconstruction.

“That was it, the end of my football career ... or so I thought.”

Sandy and Anne, and their new daughter moved to Beechworth in 1988. Sandy maintained some level of interest in football, but he was a PE teacher and a sports nut and golf, volleyball, tennis, squash, basketball and skiing beckoned. His son was born in 1990 and soon after he did a teaching exchange to Winnipeg, Canada in 1992. “I was convinced to come out of retirement. I lasted one game before fracturing my ankle.”

On his return to Beechworth, Sandy changed profession and found himself working in Public Health Promotion. At the time, the local secondary school had just completed the construction of an indoor gymnasium facility, which included a couple of indoor football goals. Sandy had friends who shared his passion for football and together, through some targeted recruitment, they managed to get enough regular players for a weekly five-a-side indoor competition.

About 15 years ago the group formalised their structure and become known as Beechworth Elite Sporting Teams (BEST). “We wanted to use George’s surname as an acronym” They progressed through various incarnations and personnel to become a walking football group. They still have many of the original players, but of course others have succumbed to age and injury over time. “The youngest is in his late 50s and the oldest is about to turn 75.”

Sandy recalls that Football Victoria was organising a WF tournament *Come and Try Day* in Melbourne, pre Covid, so BEST took a team down. “We won convincingly and held the trophy all through the pandemic.”

They were all a bit cynical about WF at first but as most of the guys were carrying injuries and either in or approaching their 60s, they thought they’d give it a go. They were surprised with

how active the game was and how it got the heart pumping, and they found it a bit of a challenge to walk into position with and without the ball, but they all recognised that this would extend their playing life.

“It’s a community thing as well,” says Sandy. “Football is the conduit for us to get together and talk a lot of rubbish at least once a week.”

He acknowledges the need for basic rules and strongly modified social games for the benefit of an aging population and the health benefits of encouraging people to be active, whether they can kick a ball properly or not, but he wouldn’t want this to disenfranchise those who still want to retain some of the more competitive elements of football.

Recently, Sandy participated in the Australian Masters in Adelaide. “We couldn’t get a team from Beechworth or the old Bendigoans together.” Someone suggested that he might like to play with a group of guys from Brisbane and Ballina under the moniker of East Coast United. “I had reservations,” he says, but he agreed. “It was great decision! It was a privilege to meet a genuine bunch of nice guys who approached the games with a perfect blend of social and competitive spirit.” The team jelled from the start and despite never having played together, ended up with the gold medal.

“The Adelaide Games and playing with East Coast United reinforce the value of team sports. I’d like to see more former players embrace the game,” he says. “Beechworth is a small rural community so our numbers are limited, but we have larger regional centres around us that have a relatively strong soccer culture. Unfortunately, the association, clubs and players can’t see beyond an over 35s competition. They don’t realise what they are missing.”

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